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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ: NINEWA REACTION TO NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Views from Ninewa political, tribal, and government officials on the new -- and permanent -- Government of Iraq vary according to ethnicity. The Shiite community is overwhelmingly upbeat, the Kurds more pragmatic, with Sunnis feeling a bit disaffected and minorities somewhat despondent. Despite such sentiments, all sides believe there is some hope that the new government will bring stability. How effective the new GOI will be dealing with security, especially militias, remains questionable. End Summary.

MEASURED VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

¶2. (C) Views from Ninewa political, tribal, and government officials on the new -- and permanent -- Government of Iraq appeared measured. Sunni politicians, especially representatives from Saleh al-Mutlaq's Al Hewar (National Dialogue) coalition, were not pleased with the shape of the new GOI. Provincial spokesman Musadeq al-Chalabi anticipated the government would undergo many changes over the next few years given the enormous tasks it needed to accomplish. He said more "relevant" ministry posts were not offered to Al Hewar, but that the coalition planned to continue engaging the new government constructively. "The powerful coalitions, like the Kurds and Tawafoq, pressured for important ministries and marginalized us," said al-Chalabi. Sunnis from Tal Afar were even more pessimistic. Dr. Yashar Abdullah Mahmoud of Turkoman Front and Sheikh Mahmoud Ibrahim al-Qado, leader of the Khowerit tribe, claimed the new GOI was still comprised of "foreigners" and not "real Iraqis." They said former Prime Ministers Chalabi and Ayad Allawi (although the latter was deemed "acceptable") had lived too long overseas and were out of touch with the people. There were "more qualified" Iraqis who were not participating in the process, and any reasonable success would be measured, they said.

¶3. (C) Less pessimistic, however, was Tawafoq coalition members from the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Dr. Adeep Chalabi said a

little more than half of Iraqis approved of the GOI, but that the new government would be only moderately successful. Chalabi claimed most capable Iraqis were either killed in wars or fled the country, and therefore there was a dearth of truly qualified candidates. The key to success, according to Chalabi, was to allow these remaining "qualified Iraqis" to take part in rebuilding the country, even if they were members of the former regime. Chalabi said the new GOI must ensure that Iranian influence, especially in southern Iraq, was marginalized and Iraq's borders protected.

MAJOR PLAYERS MORE UPBEAT, BUT "REALISTIC"

14. (C) The Kurds in Ninewa appeared more pragmatic over the success of the new GOI. National assemblyman and member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Abdelbari al-Zebari admitted there would never be 100 percent approval that the new GOI would do a good job. He believed 70 to 80 percent of Iraqis would approve since the process involved all the major coalitions. Manaf Hassan of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) echoed Kurdish sentiment in the province when saying any majority should be entitled to control the most seats. For that reason the Shia were "entitled" to form the new government, he said. Hassan admitted that without pressure from the USG and international community minorities would have received fewer ministry posts. But the distribution of ministries was 90 percent fair, he said. Shia political representatives were more upbeat. Aref Yousef of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) said the process of forming the new GOI was demanding but fruitful. He believed Shia leaders in Baghdad were able to gain vast consensus on the shape of cabinet posts, and that minority groups and the Sunni National Dialogue coalition asked for posts much larger than their electoral share. Yousef said that with Coalition Forces assistance the new GOI would bring stability to Iraq. The biggest question was when security would be turned over to Iraqi Security Forces, he

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said.

MINORITIES DOWNBEAT: WANT LARGER ROLE

15. (C) Minority responses towards the new government were a mix of frustration and despondency. Saeed Batoosh of the Yezidi Movement for Progress and Reform (YMPR) said the party wanted the GOI to respect the rights of minorities. Batoosh said although YMPR members were disappointed they did not gain a ministry post, most of the ministers selected were qualified and secular. YMPR hoped future negotiations would eventually allow minorities to play a larger role in the political process, he said. Dinkha Patros of Beth Nahrain Patriotic Union, a Chaldo/Assyrian party, seemed encouraged by new prime minister Nouri al-Maliki's promises to dissolve militias, calling it a "good indication" of a strong agenda. But minorities and smaller political parties were "still marginalized," he said. Edmon Youkhana of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) concurred saying the new government overwhelmingly favored "sectarian powers," such as the Kurds, Shia, and Sunnis. Youkhana claimed all minorities -- and even some Sunnis -- were left out of the process. Yousef Muharam of the Shabek Democratic Assembly said although SDA was a member of the Shia Coalition, SDA reps admitted minorities had been ignored during government negotiations.

COMMENT

16. (C) As PUK rep al-Zebari notes, there might never be consensus over the shape and form of the new GOI, although it is an encouraging sign that all major political coalitions are peacefully able to negotiate a government. Some Sunni Arab

groups, albeit new to the process, might never be satisfied since losing their hold on power after the fall of the former regime. But it is uncertain how much influence groups such as Al Hewan have over the Sunni population. At least, as al-Chalabi says, Al Hewan will continue working with the new government. Minorities, on the other hand, believe they are left out of the process. Several, such as Youkhana from ADM, believe the Kurds and other larger coalitions are actively working to keep minorities from playing a larger role. Whether such sentiments are true or, as is more likely, a bit embellished still does not help to address the very real problem of adequate minority representation in the new parliament by smaller parties outside the larger coalitions. Political reps from Ninewa say whatever form the new government takes they all hope it will help bring stability and security to the country and the province. This, at least, is a form of optimism.

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